

The Leadership Problematic in the Algerian Liberation Revolution and the Impact of the Soummam Outcomes on Its Framing. "Grassroots Leadership of the Revolution and Armament in Tunisia as a Model"(1955 – 1957)

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Abstract

There is no doubt that the principle of leadership in revolutions constitutes a decisive factor in directing the revolution toward its goals. The charisma of this leadership, along with the circumstances that contributed to its establishment and the push it provided to the movement, all played a vital role. Among such leaderships, we find the leaders of the Algerian Liberation Revolution, who contributed significantly—through their determination, resilience, and efforts—to advancing the revolutionary process and ensuring its continuity. This leadership, with its pioneering, organizational, and political roles, was able to steer the revolutionary struggle effectively. It provided guidance to the revolution and influenced its momentum, shaping the revolutionary movement both militarily and politically. It also played a crucial role in the historical preparation and strategic planning of the liberation process. However, the revolutionary experience also revealed the extent of internal struggles that many of its leaders endured. For instance, during the critical years between 1955 and 1957, the Algerian Liberation Army's external base in Tunisia witnessed intense conflicts among leaders. These disputes often overshadowed the unity of the revolutionary front, undermining the efforts made on the battlefield and impacting the revolution's organizational strength.

The disagreements escalated into violent confrontations, leading to numerous assassinations. A clear example of this was the tragic fate of several revolutionary leaders, including Said Abid Al-Hai and Ali Abdelkarim, who were victims of the internal conflicts within the Tunisian Command and Armament Base (1955–1957).

Keywords : Algerian Liberation Revolution – Leadership – the Soummam – Tunisia – Said Abid Al-Hai.

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Introduction:

Leadership in any organization represents the ultimate reference point to which final decisions are attributed. It is responsible for managing the organization's affairs, determining its priorities, and providing it with the means necessary to achieve the objectives for which it was established. However, this leadership may at times become a burden on the organization due to the ideological influences that affect its members, or the personal desires that overwhelm them, leading to inflated egos where each individual believes that he alone holds the final word, dismissing the authority of others. This becomes particularly problematic when leadership is framed within the outcomes of high-level meetings that are subsequently transformed into binding organizational rules. In such circumstances, both open and hidden conflicts erupt among its members, disagreements spread within their ranks, and the most devoted members of the organization pay the price. These loyal members, recognizing that the success of their revolution and the cohesion of their organization depend on it, find themselves compelled to make sacrifices and to compromise from time to time in ways that serve the ultimate objectives of the cause for which they rose up. This was precisely what occurred among the leaders of the Tunisian Base of the Revolution and Armament between 1955 and 1957, foremost among them the martyred militant leader Saïd Abdelhai.

Research Problem:

In order to understand the issue of leadership within this base, we propose the following central question:

How did the leadership problem stemming from the outcomes of the Soummam Conference affect the leaders of the Tunisian Base of the Revolution and Armament, and what were the consequences that resulted from it?

To answer this question, we relied on a set of guiding sub-questions, as follows:

1. What is the definition of leadership, and what are its types?
2. What were the leadership outcomes that emerged from the Soummam Conference, and how did they impact the hierarchy of the Revolution?
3. How was the Tunisian Base of the Revolution and Armament established? Who were its leaders, and under what conditions did it operate?

4. What was the effect of the leadership problem on the Tunisian Base of the Revolution and Armament, and what were the results it led to?

Research Methodology:

This study adopts three approaches:

The Historical Method: Used to trace historical events, situate them in their proper historical context, and interpret them through the accounts of those who lived that period and were close to its events.

The Investigative Method: Employed to conduct a comprehensive review of what has been said about these events, linking them to the realities of leadership both inside and outside, in light of the organizational rules and outcomes produced by the Soummam Conference.

The Inductive Method: Applied to observe the consequences of leadership conflicts at the level of the Tunisian Base of the Revolution and Armament, particularly their negative impact on its performance, especially after Tunisia's independence.

Significance of the Study:

Its importance lies in documenting the problem of leadership and the consequences of the leadership rules that emerged from the Soummam Conference, namely the principle of "priority of the internal over the external" and "priority of the political over the military."

Objective of the Study:

To provide a scientific approach that investigates the causes and implications of this leadership problem and its resulting consequences, while drawing upon the testimonies of those who witnessed and experienced these events.

First : Definition of Leadership and Its Types:

1. Linguistically: Leadership comes from the verb to lead, which means: (he led, he leads, leading). Leadership is the profession of the leader (الجوهري، 1979م، ص.528).

Leadership comes from "guidance", which is the opposite of "guidance": the first being from the front, and the latter from behind It is said: "a man is a leader" from the leaders (الرّأزي، 1986م، ص.232).

2. Terminologically: Leadership has several definitions, the most important of which are:

“Leadership” is that reciprocal relationship between the one who initiates the act of directing and guiding, and the one who executes it, with the aim of achieving specific objectives (عطا الله المعابطة، 2007م، ص.323).

Another states: “Leadership” is the behavior performed by an individual when directing the activity of a group toward a common goal (البدرى، 2002م، ص.105).

Gary Yukl provided a definition of leadership in which he said: “Leadership is the process of influencing others, enabling them to understand and gain agreement about what needs to be done and how it can be done effectively, and the processes that facilitate and mobilize individual and collective efforts to accomplish shared objectives” (Gary A. Yukl, 2002, p.59).

Another definition states: “It is a quality that indicates eligibility, ability, and talent to direct collective work and to attract a group of people in order to move toward achieving a common purpose. This attraction is usually realized through trust and practical or theoretical conviction in the personality of the leader or leadership figures, admiration of their conduct and behavior, their ability to accomplish tasks, and their responsiveness to the challenges posed. There must also be empathy and communication between leadership and its followers” (الكبيالي، ج.4، 1985م، ص.833).

As for its types, they are many, such as charismatic leadership, transactional leadership, and transformational leadership. However, what concerns us are the most recognized types, namely:

Individual Leadership, in which all decisions return to one individual the “leader” – and it is therefore called “individual leadership.”

Collective Leadership, in which the authority to make binding decisions for the community is entrusted to a defined group, not to an individual.

Collective leadership has essential conditions, such as that all members must be equal in rights and duties, so that none of them can impose upon the others any kind of material or moral coercion. The decision of the majority of the leadership members must be binding on the minority, who must defend and implement it at all other levels, while still retaining the opportunity to defend their opinion.

This does not mean complete equality in the ability to influence and lead within collective leadership itself (الكبيالي، نفسه، ص.834).

This mechanism of collective leadership and its process was what governed and dominated the management of the Algerian Revolution

between 1954–1956. So, what were the principles introduced by the Soummam Conference regarding the framework of leadership and its method of operation after 1956?

Second :The Leadership Outcomes that Emerged from the Soummam Conference and Their Impact on the Hierarchy of the Revolution:

The Soummam Conference of August 20, 1956 (أزغيدى، 2009م، ص.131)، with its political and organizational platform, constituted a comprehensive turning point in the national revolutionary project, in terms of the structures it established and the outcomes upon which it relied for the continuation of the revolutionary path. The two most important principles in this path were: “Priority of the Internal over the External” and “Priority of the Political over the Military” (أزغيدى، نفسه، ص.139).

The initial origins of this idea are attributed to “Mohamed Boudiaf,” who had adopted it before the outbreak of the revolution, just as he had adopted the idea of the necessity of liberating a prohibited zone that would serve as the seat for establishing the nucleus of a provisional government from within (عبّاس، 1991م، ص.66).

His aim in advocating this principle was to safeguard the leadership inside the country from the possibility of domination by the external delegation, since the latter had at its disposal the means to secure sufficient media coverage that could turn it into the recognized leadership of the revolution. At that moment, “Mohamed Boudiaf” emerged with this idea, which was adopted by those who came after him, foremost among them “Abane Ramdane,” and which came to be known as the “Priority of the Internal over the External.” This principle emphasized assigning direct responsibility for the revolution to those living inside the country. “Abane Ramdane” consolidated this principle at the “Soummam Conference,” but he added to it new political elements that appeared on the scene when discussions began about the possibility of obtaining internal autonomy (القصاب، 1986م، ص.649). From here, the internal leadership sought to take exclusive control of affairs, assuming for themselves the role of negotiating with the French government instead of the external delegation (زرّوال، 2010م، ص.43).

What we understand is that “Abane Ramdane” succeeded in undermining the external leadership by imposing upon it the principle of the “Priority of the Internal,” just as he succeeded in undermining the internal leadership by imposing the “Priority of the Political over the Military.” All of this meant that he restricted the leadership of the revolution to the internal front

because he himself was within, and confined it to the political sphere over the military because he was a politician, not a soldier. However, this success was temporary, for this very success led to his death in exile, where he had neither support nor allies. When “Abane Ramdane” was abroad, he was the first to call for revising the principle of the “Priority of the Internal over the External” (يوسف قاسمي، 2020م، ص.229).

Nonetheless, we see that the “Principle of the Priority of the Internal over the External” caused the revolution several problems and dilemmas, which we can summarize as follows:

1/- The French military leadership in Algeria benefited from it in the construction of the “Morice Line.” The explanation is that General “Vansicam,” upon studying the outcomes of the “Soummam Conference,” concluded that the leadership of the revolution consisted of two branches: one operating inside the country and the other abroad. He therefore sought to separate these two leaderships and conceived the idea of creating the Morice Line (قندل، 2008م).

2/- Needless to say, the construction of this line resulted in difficulties, primarily the isolation of the internal front from the external one, and the creation of unfavorable wartime conditions for the revolution due to the severe shortage of weapons and ammunition that the revolution experienced after the establishment of this line. From this point, the conflict began between what came to be known as the “internal front” and the “external front.” The internal leadership accused the external one of failing to provide the military means necessary to continue the struggle, while the external front focused its efforts on diplomatic work (Silmane Cheikh, 1975, p.614).

3/- This principle was later used as a pretext (09/12/1958), when the leaders of the internal wilayas met and decided to form a unified military command inside the country. The “Provisional Government” interpreted this as a separatist act from the external leadership. However, this meeting was not attended by the Second and Fifth wilayas, and thus its outcomes were never realized (Djamal Eddine Bensalm, 1985, p.283; وينظر، المنظمة الوطنية (للمجاهدين، من 22 إلى 26 أفريل 1987م، ص.14). For this reason, we argue that the failure of all wilayas to unite under one position constituted a factor in maintaining military unity. Had all the wilayas participated and unanimously agreed on a certain policy, obliging the “Provisional Government” to adopt it, and had this not been possible for that government, the results would undoubtedly have led to greater complications in the conflict between these wilayas, the eastern and western general staffs, and the “Provisional Government” abroad. The consequences

of such a situation would have been unpredictable. Evidence for this view is the position of the “Fourth Wilaya” when it entered into negotiations with the “Élysée Palace” (بورقة، 2000م، ص.67). One of the reasons for the failure of these negotiations was that this wilaya stood alone in its position. As a result, it eventually abandoned this stance or rather, was forced to abandon it. Had this wilaya received support and consensus from the other wilayas, its negotiations with the Élysée would have taken a different course, one that would have influenced the revolution. But God spared the revolution the disaster it could have faced.

This was with respect to the internal situation. As for the external leadership, when we examine its general condition, we find it more dangerous and more critical than that of the internal leadership. When the first meeting of the Revolutionary Council was held in Cairo between August 20 and 28, 1957 (يحي بوعزيز، 1996م، ص.187), the military prevailed over the politicians by removing them from the leadership of the “Coordinating and Executive Committee” and taking for themselves the lion’s share in directing it. They excluded “Benyoucef Benkhedda” and “Saad Dahlab” from this executive body, and they reduced “Abane Ramdane” to a position lower than the one granted to him by the “Soummam Conference”—or rather, lower than the one he had granted himself during that conference. This meant that the leadership of the revolution, at the level of the executive body which was the “Coordinating and Executive Committee,” fell into the hands of the five commanders of the military wilayas (هشماوي، 2010م، ص.134).

Accordingly, the military leaders were the ones directing the revolution from behind the scenes—indeed, they were openly steering it—because they believed themselves responsible for its fate, as they were the ones who had ignited it in the first place. Meanwhile, the politicians, foremost among them “Mohamed El-Amin Debaghine,” denied them recognition, even though he had been offered the honor of initiating the revolution in his name and assuming its leadership, but he refused (عبّاس، اغتيال ... حلم. 2003م، ص.188). In truth, there was a complementarity between the politicians and the military: the former could not alone lead the revolution, since they were not among those who had ignited it, while the latter could not direct it alone either, since they were almost devoid of the element of competence and capacity. Therefore, they complemented one another.

Just as there was complementarity between the interior and the exterior, the latter spoke in the name of the revolution inside the country, expressing its military activities, the sacrifices of the people, and the repression and

persecution they endured. At the same time, the interior felt encouraged because it had a legitimate leadership representing it abroad, one that consistently carried its voice to international forums. Thus, it became a voice that was heard thanks to the representation it had established abroad (زرّوال، المرجع السابق، ص.46).

In reality, the liberation revolution, from its outbreak until the declaration of independence, experienced a profound political contradiction between what was known as the “interior” and the “exterior,” and between the political and the military, along with the constant search for expanding influence. For instance, among those who conducted the proceedings of the “Soummam Conference,” some wanted to extend their influence and military authority beyond the wilayah they were leading. Otherwise, how can we explain the appointment of “Ali Mellah” as the head of the “Sixth Wilaya” while he originally belonged to the “Third Wilaya”? Was it not aimed at getting rid of him because he preceded both “Krim Belkacem” and “Amar Ouamrane” in militant struggle and was more cultured than both? If this view allowed them to remove him from their region, it also achieved another goal no less significant than the first—namely, the appointment of one of their supporters at the head of that wilayah. Otherwise, how do we also explain the assignment of the leadership of the “Fourth Wilaya,” after the arrest of “Rabah Bitat,” to Colonel “Amar Ouamrane,” at a time when this responsibility should have been entrusted to the late “Boudjemaa Souidani” as deputy of “Rabah Bitat”? Indeed, it is truly strange to find in this phase “Amar Ouamrane” as commander of the “Fourth Wilaya” (ولد (والمدني، ج.3، 1988م، ص.236) during the “Soummam Conference,” where its organization was officially proclaimed during the conference but it did not exercise its functions as a wilayah until August 1, 1957 (بورقة، المصدر السابق، ص.116 – 117).

When the country gained independence and the units of the National Liberation Army entered from the eastern and western borders, the notion of the “interior” and the “exterior” reappeared once again when we began to hear the expression “Army of the Exterior” or “Army of the Borders.” One of the immediate causes that fed and promoted this notion was the conflict that then existed between the “Provisional Government” and the “General Staff.” Some parties exploited this conflict to sharpen divisions by focusing on the idea of the “interior” versus the “exterior” (الديب، 1990م، ص.629).

We can interpret the stance of the “Sixth Wilaya” in 1962 as one characterized by abandoning the “Wilayas of the Interior” and joining the

“General Staff,” since the latter was in harmony and concord with “Ahmed Ben Bella,” who himself was aligned with “Mohamed Khider”—a native of Biskra and a member of the Political Bureau in 1962. Here, the objectives of “Mohamed Chaabani” become clear, as he had high hopes of being entrusted with the leadership of the Ministry of Defense. He aspired to reach this position by supporting the stronger side at that time, namely the “General Staff,” backed by “Ahmed Ben Bella” and his allies (زرّوال، المرجع (السّابق، ص.49).

And if the principle of “Priority of the Interior over the Exterior” was later amended to read as “No priority of the Interior over the Exterior,” we see no objection to this change as long as the circumstances themselves had changed, and the old methods of struggle were swept away by new and pressing conditions namely, the presence of the revolutionary leadership abroad, after it was compelled to leave the city of Algiers following the strike (بن خدّة، 2005م، ص.52. وينظر، بن خدّة، 2004م، ص.117) This general strike paralyzed daily life in the city and was used by the French military command as a pretext for brutal reprisals against citizens and militants, including the killing of many, foremost among them “Larbi Ben M’hidi” (بلدية عين مليلة، 2004م، ص.27).

As for the second outcome, the principle of the "Primacy of the Political over the Military," what we suggest regarding this principle is that "Abane Ramdane" was the one who adopted it on his own initiative and under the influence of some of his advisers to whom he entrusted membership in the "Committee of Coordination and Execution," namely: "Saad Dahlab" and "Benyoucef Benkhedda" (نور الدّين حاروش، 2011م، ص.240) (– 252).

What appears from following the course of the revolution is that this principle, conceived by "Abane Ramdane" and his advisers and drafted for presentation to the participants at the Soummam Conference, was indeed justified in stipulating it, because the revolution must have a political leadership—especially if this leadership consists of a set of other political organizations representing national unity. However, we may also say that those who conceived this principle were mindful of the balance between themselves as political leaders and the military commanders. While the latter each relied on the military zone they supervised, the politicians thought of forming a general leadership of the revolution in which the decisive word would belong to them, by virtue of the logic of things and the political weight they derived for themselves from this political leadership—

that is, seizing the supreme authority within the "Front de Libération" (بلحاج، 2006م، ص.14).

If we share the opinion that the revolution must have a political leadership, the mistake that these politicians made was in the way they expressed this principle. Their formulation implied that there were military men as mere executors and politicians responsible over them—yet these same military men had, not long before, refused to entrust the revolution's leadership to the politicians, as we have seen in the case of "Ammar Debaghine." Based on this stance, would these military leaders accept to be under a political authority that had only recently declined to assume the supreme leadership of the revolution? However, what is striking is that "Abane Ramdane" wanted a new leadership in which he himself would have the upper hand and the final say (لونييسي، 2000م، ص.16).

The principle of "Primacy of the Political over the Military," as well as the principle of "Primacy of the Internal over the External," led to disastrous results for the revolution. Eleven months after its adoption, it resulted in the assassination of "Abane Ramdane," the fervent defender of this principle. Moreover, this principle, advocated by the internal leadership, gave rise to a counter-principle, namely "Primacy of the Military over the Political." "Ahmed Ben Bella," "Mohamed Boudiaf," and "Ali Mahsas" were those who carried this slogan; they were all members of the "Organisation Spéciale," and one of them, "Ahmed Ben Bella," was even its leader. While these men abroad proclaimed that the revolution's leadership must be entrusted to the military—since they were the ones who ignited the revolution—we know that "Ahmed Ben Bella" established a committee in Cairo which he considered the supreme leadership of the delegation alongside the internal leaders. This committee was composed of six people: "Ahmed Ben Bella," "Mohamed Khider," "Ammar Debaghine," "Larbi Ben M'hidi," "Dridi" (Mohamed Boudiaf), and "Hakim" (Aït Ahmed) (المدني، (المصدر السابق، ج.3، ص.154).

Commenting on this committee, "Mohamed Khider" said: "New leaders joined us after the establishment of this committee, and we must consider how to involve them in the higher responsibilities of the revolution." If this hint by "Mohamed Khider" suggested something, "Abderrahmane Kiouane" openly declared it when he said:

"This committee does not enjoy a legal status, as it was formed spontaneously and arrogated to itself powers that the law may not grant it; therefore, it should not represent an obstacle to us in fulfilling our duties." (زروال، المرجع السابق، ص.52).

The political leadership inside the country insisted that the revolution must be led by politicians, since it could not achieve military victory over the enemy. This was due to both internal and external reasons, primarily the lack of large military resources that could secure such a victory. This leadership believed that the great military defeat suffered by France in Indochina would be repeated in Algeria, but as a political defeat this time.

This idea led some members of the "Committee of Coordination and Execution" to attempt to transfer the armed struggle from the mountains to the cities, with the aim of gradually working toward this political victory. Hence emerged the idea of the "Eight-Day Strike" (- 59، ص. 1996م، بومالي، 65)، which sought to demonstrate to France and to the world that the war raging in Algeria was a total war—fought in the mountains as well as in the cities (عَبَّاس، ثَوَّار عَظْمَاء، المرجع السَّابِق، ص. 273). Indeed, it was perhaps even fiercer in the cities than in the mountains, since it was the popular masses who kindled its flames daily in the urban centers, bore its burdens, and upon whose hands victory would eventually be achieved.

What supports this idea of achieving a "Political Dien Bien Phu" in Algeria is the statement made by Larbi Ben M'hidi to Youssef Zighoud when they bid each other farewell after the conclusion of the Soummam Conference: "We will meet again in Algiers in December 1956." (زروال،) (المرجع السَّابِق، ص. 52).

The idea of "Primacy of the Political over the Military," which had been adopted by Abane Ramdane and imposed on the conference participants, was abandoned in the very first meeting held in Cairo in July 1957. At that meeting, the two principles of "Primacy of the Internal over the External" and "Primacy of the Political over the Military" (بلحاج، المرجع السَّابِق، ص. 17) were modified into the following formula: "No primacy for the internal over the external," and "No primacy for the political over the military," in exchange for abandoning the idea of secularism that had been mentioned in some of the documents of the Soummam Conference (قاسمي، المرجع السَّابِق،) (ص. 229 - 230).

As a result of this modification, the number of military members in the "Committee of Coordination and Execution" exceeded the number of political members, after both Benyoucef Benkhedda and Saad Dahlab were excluded from its membership. Abane Ramdane was thus relegated to the second rank within this committee, losing the great political importance he had secured for himself at the Soummam Conference. Yet he did not submit to this new political situation imposed upon him. Instead, he became highly critical and opposed those who had enforced this reality—one which he

resented, particularly since he had long called for prioritizing political action over military action, and for requiring the major military commanders to return inside the country to manage the war, leaving political affairs to the politicians abroad.

When he despaired of realizing this idea, he began calling for his own return inside the country, where he could establish a parallel system to that existing abroad (زرّوال، المرجع السابق، ص.54).

In conclusion, this conflict would be reflected in the dynamics of the revolutionary base in Tunisia and its leadership. How, then, was this base formed? And how did the conflict impact its course?

Third : The Formation of the Revolution's Base and Armament in Tunisia:

Due to the pressing need that imposed itself on the Revolution in terms of supplying it with weapons and ensuring this in the best possible manner, the leadership of the Liberation Revolution decided to establish a base in Tunisia whose mission was to provide arms along with other tasks. One of its prominent revolutionary figures, the martyr and militant leader Saïd Abdelhai, was entrusted with this responsibility. So how did this come about?

Saïd Abdelhai possessed a fervent patriotic spirit, nurtured through gatherings at his brother's shop in the city of Constantine, as well as his activism within the office of the Association of Algerian Students of Al-Zaytouna. These experiences prepared him to join the Liberation Revolution at its outbreak. He engaged in several military operations in the Aurès against the French army, during which he demonstrated exceptional abilities that distinguished him from others and caught the attention of the historic regional leaders, especially Mustapha Ben Boulaïd and Bachir Chihani (مقابلة مع، بسر، 15 أوت 2019م).

Since Tunisia was considered the gateway to the Arab East for Algerians, the leaders of the Revolution decided that it should serve as a rear base to supply the Revolution with its needs, and as a station for those heading to or coming from the Arab East. The appointed person had to be capable of engaging with Tunisian politicians and the Algerian community, persuading them of the necessity of material contribution, and informing popular organizations in Tunisia of the aims of the Algerian Revolution, convincing them to support it and assist it at all levels, and through all possible means of aid (غرّنوق، 2017م، ص.16).

Based on these required qualifications, the leadership of the Revolution selected *Saïd Abdelhai*. He was appointed by *Bachir Chihani* at the end of March 1955 (وزارة المجاهدين، 2007م، ص.187) to take charge of arms procurement along the Tunisian border, in coordination with the external delegation represented particularly by *Ahmed Ben Bella* and *Ali Mahsas* (عبيّاس، مُثقفون، 2004م، ص.79). He was also tasked with organizing the Al-Zaytouna students, as well as coordinating between the internal and external fronts (علي بلهادي وبن يوسف تلمساني، جوان/2022م، ص.277).

Upon his arrival in Tunisia, *Saïd Abdelhai* began contacting his fellow students who embodied the qualities of loyal militants. He succeeded in this endeavor, attracting around him a group of young men from *Oued Souf* who assisted him in establishing a revolutionary base with integrity, sincerity, and dedication, and with wisdom in planning and in structuring revolutionary units. He then started secretly collecting donations and contributions through letters sent to wealthy Algerians, carried at night in secrecy by these young men, since the political conditions at the time did not allow for publicity, as public security in Tunisia was still under French control (غرنوق، المصدر السابق، ج.1، ص.17).

Through this effort, *Abdelhai* managed to become the strongest representative of the National Liberation Army, while also organizing the National Liberation Front on the political level. Thus, he assumed a dual responsibility—political and military—and with seriousness, wisdom, and courage in managing both, he succeeded in consolidating the foundations of his system of operations throughout Tunisian territory (العمامرة، 2006م، ص.108). He also served as the vital link between the internal and external fronts in supplying the Revolution with arms, equipment, and men. This gave the Revolution, in its early stages, strength and prestige in both the political and military arenas, projecting the image of a force that would not yield or be defeated, due to its capacity for maneuvering and devising ingenious solutions (مقابلة مع، المجاهد علي محساس، 27 ديسمبر 2012م). Moreover, *Saïd Abdelhai* took the initiative of consolidating the leadership of the Liberation Revolution by establishing a powerful intelligence apparatus. In this regard, Abdel Salam Chabi recounts that *Abdelhai* set up a rigorous system, saying: “When *Ben Tobbal* tasked me with bringing weapons to the Second Wilaya, I entered Tunisia and stayed at the *Splendide* Hotel. My cousin advised me to be cautious, warning me that *Abdelhai* detained every Algerian entering Tunisia from Algeria in order to interrogate him. I dismissed his advice lightly, but when I retired to my room that night, two men knocked on the door and said ‘Police.’ When I opened, they entered, seized my revolver, and took me that night to the palace of *Dandan*. I did

not know where they had brought me until *Abdelhai's* secretary, *Abdelmajid Cherif*, informed me that I was at the headquarters of the Revolutionary Administration. At dawn, *Abdelhai* began interrogating me. *Abdelmajid*, who already knew me, introduced me. Yet *Abdelhai* did not trust me until I presented the letter from *Ben Tobbal* requesting weapons for the Second Wilaya. Only then was he reassured, and he provided me with housing reserved for the Wilaya so we could use it as an office. He told me that all kinds of weapons were available, and thus I was able to deliver the first shipment of weapons to the Second Wilaya.” (علي بلهادي وبن يوسف تلمساني، المرجع السابق، ص.278).

Nevertheless, this organized work and *Abdelhai's* ability to structure and control every corner of Tunisia, from one end of the country to the other (Yves Courrière, 2005, p.76), did not sit well with all the leaders of the *Soummam Conference* nor with those who shared interests with them, including the Tunisian regime (ص.171 – 170، 2017م، حشية).

Fourth – The Conditions and Realities of the Base's Work Amid Tunisian Division and the Priorities of the Soummam Conference:

The Revolution's base in *Tunisia* was established amidst a Tunisian division between the supporters of *Habib Bourguiba*—who entered into negotiations with *France* at the expense of *Algeria* and *Morocco*, contrary to what had been agreed upon at the Arab Maghreb Library in Cairo and publicly declared by the revolutionary leaders (ص.159 – الدّيب، المصدر السابق، ص.187) (162. وينظر، الطاهر عبد الله، 1990م، ص.128. وينظر، عليّة الصّغير، 2007م، ص.187) and the supporters of *Salah Ben Youssef*, who rejected these negotiations. *Salah Ben Youssef* considered the talks to be a stab in the back of the Algerian Revolution. This position led to a sharp division among Tunisians, to the extent that *Habib Bourguiba* established “Care Committees” made up of former resistance fighters who had surrendered their weapons as part of the negotiations, with the aim of suppressing opponents of the agreements (علي بلهادي وبن يوسف تلمساني، المرجع السابق، ص.279).

As a reaction to Bourguiba's actions, other Tunisian resistance fighters opposed to the negotiations undertook recruitment campaigns, collected weapons, and joined the mountains under the banner of the *Youssefist Resistance*. On November 11, 1955, *Taher Lassoud* declared his allegiance to *Salah Ben Youssef*. Over time, these groups formed networks spread throughout southern Tunisia, serving as a source of information for the Algerian Revolution and the population as a whole, while also supplying provisions for the resistance fighters and securing supply routes for arms (ص.94) (القاضي، 2001م، ص.175 – 176. وينظر، عليّة الصّغير، 2001م، ص.94).

framework, contacts were established with the resistance movements in Algeria and Morocco, coordinated with Egypt, in an effort to revive the *Army for the Liberation of the Maghreb*. Its first communiqué was issued in October 1955, signed by the “Moroccan Resistance,” the “Algerian National Liberation Front,” and the *Youssefist Resistance* representing Tunisia (السُّوفي، 2006م، ص.161).

During this Tunisian conflict, the role of *Saïd Abdelhai* within the *Army for the Liberation of the Maghreb* was known only through French reports, which recorded the interrogations of prisoners captured in battles against the French. These interrogations concluded that *Saïd Abdelhai* represented the authority and leadership of the Algerian Revolution in Tunisia, with his mission being to liaise with and coordinate alongside the higher leadership. Within this context, *Saïd Abdelhai* played an important role due to his leadership position in Tunisia. He was present at the meeting of the leaders of the Maghreb countries, held at the house of *Salah Ben Youssef* on January 20, 1956, where he, together with *Abbas Laghrour*, represented Algeria. The Tunisian delegation included *Taher Lassoud*, *Tayeb Zellag*, *Ali Zlitni*, *Mohamed Ben Dhaw El-Boubekri*, and *Abdelkader Zarrouk*, while *Mohamed El-Basri* represented Morocco. The meeting agreed to unify efforts to relaunch the *Army for the Liberation of the Maghreb*, drew up plans, and decided to send elements for training in combat techniques (الطَّاهِر (عبد الله، المرجع السابق، ص.132).

The participation of external leaders as well as *Saïd Abdelhai's* group in the units of the *Army for the Liberation of the Maghreb* alarmed the Tunisian authorities, since they supported *Salah Ben Youssef* (الشَّابِي، 2007م، ص.17 – 34). By early 1956, Tunisian officials had grown uneasy with the multiplicity of spokespersons speaking on behalf of the Algerian Revolution in Tunisia. They requested that the internal delegation—*Abane Ramdane* and his companions—identify the proper leader with whom they should deal. As a result, *Abane Ramdane* sent the revolutionary leader *Hamed Rouabahia*. After making contact, *Hamed* informed them that there was indeed an official responsible for the Revolution, namely *Saïd Abdelhai*, with whom the Tunisian government was already formally dealing. However, *Abane Ramdane* asked *Hamed Rouabahia* to return to Tunisia as the representative of the *National Liberation Front*, alongside *Aït Hassan* (بوصفصاف وآخرون، 2015م، ص.324 – 343), to replace *Saïd Abdelhai*. Initially, *Hamed* felt uncomfortable with this assignment and resisted, but *Abane Ramdane's* insistence eventually led him to accept (نفسه، ص.372 – 374).

All these appointments took place in the absence of the historic leadership, represented by Mustapha Ben Boulaïd and Bachir Chihani, as well as the external delegation of the Revolution, and marked the beginning of Abane Ramdane's dominance over the scene.

On May 12, 1956, Commander Hamed Rouabahia went to Tunisia, where he was received coldly by Saïd Abdelhai. Shortly thereafter, Abdelhai arrested him along with a group of other supporters of the internal leadership (246.ص. 1992م، حديث الاثنين، عبّاس،) Mujahid Commander El-Wardi Kettal and Mujahid Commander Omar El-Bouqsi intervened. In this regard, El-Wardi Kettal recounted: "At that time, we received another report that Abdelhai Soufi had captured a group of mujahideen. We went to him to clarify the matter and verify everything. We found that Abdelhai Soufi had detained Hamed Rouabahia, Naqqach, and Aït Hassan." He continues: "Abdelhai justified his actions by saying that 'they did not carry travel permits.' We also discovered that he had arrested Mahmoud Cherif and Amar Omari, who had come from the First Wilaya and were seriously wounded after fighting a battle with the enemy's army... Abdelhai was simply applying the instructions: anyone without authorization from the leadership or a written permit would be arrested, for he was extremely vigilant in his security instincts." (137.ص. 2018م، قتال عراسه).

El-Wardi Kettal succeeded in arranging a reconciliation meeting that resulted in the formation of a committee headed by Saïd Abdelhai, with Commander Hamed and Aït Hassan serving as deputies (سعد العمامرة، المرجع) (السابق، ص. 110).

Based on these field developments, particularly the unity of the Maghreb struggle referred to earlier, the French government realized the gravity of the situation in the Maghreb region. It therefore reached an agreement with the Tunisian leadership and drew in the King of Morocco to prevent the establishment of a strong Maghreb front. France sought to separate the liberation struggles of the Maghreb from one another, especially after the evident inability of its armed forces and economic resources to confront the spread of armed struggle across the entire Maghreb. Thus, it resorted to granting independence to Morocco and Tunisia in order to focus its efforts on Algeria (علي بلهادي وبن يوسف تلمساني، المرجع السابق، ص. 280).

This new development—namely "negotiations" and the "independence of Tunisia"—cast its shadow on the support previously provided by the Tunisian Liberation Army to the Army for the Liberation of the Maghreb within the framework of joint struggle (الطاهر عبد الله، المرجع السابق، ص. 118 - 119). That support did not last long; immediately after Tunisia declared

independence, the leaders of this army surrendered themselves to the Tunisian authorities (أحمد القصاب، المرجع السابق، ص.652). This led to internal divisions within the Tunisian Liberation Army, between supporters and opponents, despite Salah Ben Youssef's insistence on continuing the path of joint struggle to complete national sovereignty and to assist the Algerians in their Revolution. However, Bourguiba's alliance with French forces prevented this.

Consequently, the Algerian internal leadership adopted a policy of dealing with the new reality and directed harsh criticism at the strategy of "Maghrebizing the war," which the external leadership had upheld. This led to tensions between the internal and external leaderships (بشيري، 2005م،) (ص.84). The new leadership of the Algerian Revolution, for its part, marginalized and eliminated elements committed to joint armed struggle, accusing them of being supported by Egyptian authorities and of disrupting the authority established by the Soummam Conference and its resolutions (ص.101، 2012م، ص.260. وينظر، ميموني، 2012م، ص.101).

So how did this situation impact the leadership of the Revolution's base in Tunisia?

Fifth – The Impact of the Leadership Problem on the Revolutionary Base and Armament in Tunisia and the Consequences Thereof:

Due to the emergence of several reasons and factors on the revolutionary scene in Algeria, the most significant of which was the martyrdom of *Bachir Chihani*, the supreme commander of the National Liberation Army's internal operations, on **October 23, 1955**—bearing in mind that he was the one who appointed *Said Abdelhai* to establish the base in *Tunisia*—and the martyrdom of the symbolic fighter and commander *Mustapha Ben Boulaïd* on **March 22, 1956**, together with the outcomes of the *Soummam Congress* which we discussed earlier, as well as the reality of the Tunisian scene after entering into negotiations with the French side, which granted Tunisia its independence on **March 20, 1956**. As a result, the activity of the *Tunisian Liberation Army* declined, with a large proportion of its fighters preferring to cease combat and hand over their weapons to the new Tunisian regime (السُّوفي، المرجع السابق، ص.196), thus distancing themselves from the idea of joint struggle which we previously elaborated.

In this context, the revolutionary leadership in *Tunisia*—up until September 1956 (ص.636، جوان/2024م، ص.636)—experienced tensions and conflict with the new regime in Tunisia under *Habib Bourguiba*, who sought to assert his authority and power over the country (عبّاس، مُتفقون،)

80. المرجع السابق، ص. 80). Meanwhile, secondary disagreements also surfaced among the *Aurès* leadership, leading to violent conflicts between brothers-in-arms. In an attempt to defuse this strife, both *Said Abdelhai* and *Abbas Laghrour* invited the disputants to a reconciliation meeting bringing together the leaders of *Nemamcha* and the *Aurès* fighters (عوادي، 2013م، ص. 107 – 109), held at the headquarters of the revolutionary base in *Tunisia*. Organizationally, the revolutionary base in *Tunisia*—along with Commander *Said Abdelhai*—was under the command of the martyred fighter and commander *Abbas Laghrour* (بسر، الأمجاد، 2019م، ص. 60).

He summoned everyone to *Tunisia* for reconciliation. Several meetings were held, but they ended with the use of weapons inside the *La Kania Villa* (علي بلهادي، المرجع السابق، ص. 637 – 638). Tunisian security forces—recently formed—intervened with force and violence, thereby putting an end to this dispute.

These forces supported the *internal faction*—*Abane Ramdane* and his group—who sought to arrest *Said Abdelhai* and his companions. They raided the headquarters of the revolutionary base—located in *Qasr al-Dandan* (قمعون، 2006م، ص. 84) in the city of *Manouba*, near the Tunisian capital—at night, under the command of *Mahjoub Ben Ali*, claiming that they were acting under orders from the *High Command of the Revolutionary Council*. Meanwhile, *Ahmed Ben Bella* stripped Commander *Said Abdelhai* of his responsibility over the base and ordered *Ali Mahsas* to carry this out. Indeed, *Ahmed Tlili*, who was in charge of Algerian affairs at the Tunisian presidential palace, appealed to *Ahmed Ben Bella*, requesting that the political cover for Commander *Said Abdelhai* and *Abdelkrim Hali* be withdrawn. *Ben Bella* agreed to this both in writing and orally (بسر، المرجع السابق، ص. 60). On this matter, *Ali Mahsas* provided testimony regarding this very issue, stating: “Amidst the preoccupation with the armed struggle and the needs of the fighters inside Algeria, as I was moving between *Tunisia*, *Libya*, and sometimes *Egypt*, I received an order through *Khider* to head to *Tunisia* and remove *Said Abdelhai*, one of the *Aurès* commanders, along with his companion *Taleb Larbi*, from their duties as representatives of the First Wilaya in *Tunisia*, and to hand over their responsibilities to others sent by *Abane Ramdane*. At that point, I realized that *Ben Bella* had fallen under the influence of *Lamine Debaghine*, who had become an instrument in the hands of *Abane Ramdane’s* group, which was seeking to make him the official representative of the revolution abroad as part of its attempt to extend its influence.” (لمجد، 2013م، ص. 93 – 94).

On the other hand, on September 30, 1956, a meeting was held that served as a reconciliation conference, attended by Commander Said Abdelhai and his comrade in the struggle, Commander Abbas Laghrour. One of its decisions was to approve Said Abdelhai's wish to return to the Aurès, delegating Mahmoud Mentouri to replace him in Tunisia. After the meeting, Commander Abbas Laghrour moved back towards his command headquarters in the Aurès, and on the way he attacked a French unit stationed on Tunisian soil, destroying several of its tanks (عبّاس، مُتفقون، (المرجع السّابق، ص.83).

On the morning of October 1, 1956, units of the Tunisian army under the command of Mahjoub Ben Ali, accompanied by Ahmed Mehasas, surrounded the Qasr al-Dandan, arresting Abdelhai and his group, who were then imprisoned in Zandana Prison (نفسه). With Said Abdelhai and his group imprisoned, Bourguiba's authorities found their pretext, claiming they could not allow fighting to take place on Tunisian soil. Likewise, Abbas Laghrour was also imprisoned on the grounds of conducting military operations against French convoys on Tunisian territory, and the matter of both men was handed over to the group of Abane Ramdane (لمجد، المرجع (السّابق، ص.96). By the end of 1956, the new leadership arrived in Tunisia along with their supporters from both Wilaya III and Wilaya II, seeking to seize control of the base. Their mission was facilitated by Ahmed Mehasas, who withdrew and fled to Italy (بسر، المرجع السّابق، ص.61). The orientations and ideology of the Soummam group aligned with the regime of Habib Bourguiba, representing Westernized tendencies opposed to the Islamic and Arab nationalist orientations (لمجد، المرجع السّابق، ص.95).

Said Abdelhai and the rest of the commanders remained in prison (بسر، (المرجع السّابق، ص.61) until they were subjected to a mock trial in the Tunisian city of Teboursouk. The court was composed of Abdallah Ben Tobbal as president, Amar Ben Aouda as deputy, Amar Boughelaz as member, and Mahmoud Cherif as prosecutor (زرّوال، اللّمامشة في الثّورة، ج.3، 2016م، ص.31). The latter prepared an extensive file against the commanders Said Abdelhai, Lazhar Chriet, Abbas Laghrour, Abdelkrim Hali, Mahmoud Mentouri, Tijani Othmani, and other Aurès leaders who opposed the orientations of the new leadership of the Algerian revolution born out of the Soummam Congress, which was in harmony with the Tunisian leadership.

They were sentenced to death—a fate that was carried out in the area of Mount Bourbiaa, on the Algerian-Tunisian border, on June 27, 1957 (though some sources claim the trial was on July 27, 1957; ينظر، بسر، المرجع السّابق،

ص.61؛ ومُحمَّد بلقاسم، المرجع السَّابق، ص.268؛ زروال: اللمامشة في الثورة. دراسة، 2003م، (ص.380).

With the execution of some of the finest sons of the revolution and the founding leaders of the Tunisian revolutionary base, the curtain fell on the first chapter of executions that would later continue as a result of the Soummam decisions—decisions that had caused a rift among the leaders of the revolution, both inside and outside Algeria (عبَّاس، في كواليس التَّاريخ (1). ص.58 – 17.م، 2008).

Sixth: Conclusion and Findings:

From the above discussion, we have reached the following conclusions: The resolutions of the *Soummam Congress*, particularly the two principles of “*Primacy of the internal over the external*” and “*Primacy of the political over the military*”, sowed the seeds of discord that nearly undermined the revolution in its entirety. This was averted only thanks to the success of the meeting held by the *Coordination and Execution Committee* in Cairo, which corrected the course taken by the *Soummam group*.

The departure of the martyr and mujahid commander Bashir Chihani, followed by that of the martyr and mujahid commander Mustafa Ben Boulaïd, created a stormy atmosphere at the leadership level. This ultimately resulted in the liquidation of the base leadership in Tunisia, represented by the martyr commander mujahid Said Abdelhai and his fellow commanders. Their elimination paved the way for the appointment of Mahmoud Cherif by Abane Ramdane, which was considered an indication of sidelining the higher revolutionary leadership and replacing it with a new one—particularly after the *hijacking of the leaders’ plane on October 22, 1956*. This incident occurred under mysterious circumstances, especially since the abducted leaders had been strongly committed to the unity of the struggle fronts and joint combat. Their insistence on this vision, along with the persistence of the Tunisian Saleh Ben Youssef and the Moroccan wing led by the mujahid Sheikh Abdelkrim al-Khattabi in Morocco, would have disturbed the course of independence in *Tunisia* and *Morocco* and weakened the new leaderships there. Thus, the hijacking operation came as a means to break the unity of the struggle fronts and the joint combat.

The establishment of the revolutionary base and the supply of arms in *Tunisia*, beginning in March 1955, came as a pressing necessity for the revolution, to provide it with weapons, men, and funds. However, this period also witnessed the opening of negotiations between Habib Bourguiba and the French occupier, leading to the independence of *Tunisia*.

This development struck at the very heart of the unity dimension and undermined the idea of joint armed struggle, in favor of fragmentation and the separation of the struggle fronts. This orientation was in line with the direction of the new Algerian revolutionary leadership that emerged from the *Soummam Congress*. In response to a letter from the external delegation, Abane Ramdane explicitly stated: “*We do not share your view on the strategy of Maghreb alliances... Your positions appear as though you are Moroccans before being Algerians, whereas we prefer to be Algerians first*” (عَبَّاس، مُتَقَفُونَ، المرجع السَّابِق، ص.81). This statement reflects a divergence in intellectual foundations and in the unity of thought that had prevailed before the *Soummam Congress*—a unity that was embodied by the revolutionary leadership that launched the revolution, drawing from its earlier struggle within the *Maghreb Bureau* and the *Committee for the Liberation of the Maghreb* in Cairo.

The absence of a language of dialogue, combined with the reliance of the *Soummam* leadership on loyalty, domination, regionalism, and factionalism, led to the elimination of historical revolutionary leaders. These were men with long-standing nationalist commitment, formation, and experience, who had borne arms within the earliest units and ranks, and who had fought valiantly against the French occupier. Yet fate decreed that the Algerian Revolution would consume its finest sons and commanders to the point of excess (عَبَّاس، في كواليس التَّارِيخ (1). المرجع السَّابِق، ص.38), owing to the emergence of unrestrained ambitions—ambitions which, though natural, lacked wise leadership to structure and channel them toward safe ground. Such guidance might have spared the revolutionary leadership from sliding into the perilous path of liquidation and fratricide.

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